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Africa Review

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AFRICA REVIEW (U)

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Since becoming president in 1971, William Tolbert, 65, has presided over a quiet revolution that has featured a gradual increase in the pace of social and political change begun by his predecessor and has earned him the reputation as the country's leading reformer. [REDACTED]

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Ghana: Civilian Political Activity (U)

Preparations by General Akuffo's eight-month-old military regime for an orderly transfer of power next July to an elected civilian government are presently on track. Eight of the 20 civilian political parties that have applied for registration have been provisionally certified so far by Ghana's electoral commission. The political situation has remained fluid since the ban on politics was lifted on 1 January, and the final lineup of parties that will contest elections later this year is not yet clear. Mergers between the 36 declared groups on the scene are occurring and possibly as few as three viable national parties will be left by the end of March. [REDACTED]

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While old faces from previous civilian regimes predominate, no clear front-runner for future national leadership is now evident. The major emergent parties are concentrating on consolidating their strength and have not held conventions to select presidential or parliamentary candidates. Several associates of General Akuffo on the ruling military council, particularly Chief of Defense Staff General Hamidu, reportedly are working behind the scenes with various party leaders in attempts to secure important military positions under a civilian government rather than face retirement from active duty with the changeover to constitutional rule. [REDACTED]

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Leading Political Parties

Four principal parties appear to be emerging. Three of them are based on remnants of the old Convention People's Party of late President Nkrumah, who ruled from 1957 to 1966, and the Progress Party of late Prime Minister Busia, Nkrumah's historical rival who governed from 1968 to 1972. Two parties consisting of factions of the Progress Party, presently split over personalities and ideology, appear to be in the lead. The host of minor parties will probably attempt to broker their support to one of the principal parties or simply fade away. [REDACTED]

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Among the major contenders, the United National Convention Party (UNC), led by William Ofori-Atta who was Foreign Minister under Busia, seems to have an edge over the Popular Front Party (PF) led by B. J. Da Rocha, former Secretary General of Busia's party. Ghanaian observers expect that the two parties will eventually merge. This would create the single most powerful party, with a generally right-of-center political philosophy.

Nkrumah's old stalwarts are principally grouped together in the third-ranking People's National Party (PNP) chaired by Imoru Egala, Minister of Industries under Nkrumah. The group leans toward a form of African socialism similar to that espoused by Nkrumah's leftist oriented party.

The fourth ranking Action Congress Party (ACP) is built around a new breed of young Ghanaian politicians who represent a broader philosophy and range of interests than do any of the latter day offshoots of the old Busia and Nkrumah groupings. The party is led by retired Army colonel Frank Bernasko who resigned as Minister of Agriculture and Cocoa Affairs in 1975 after a serious disagreement with General Acheampong. The latter was ousted last July by General Akuffo. Although Bernasko has a reputation for honesty, his attractiveness is reduced by his popular identification with Ghana's generally discredited military. Bernasko's party also has a more narrow regional cast than the other leading parties. Unless the ACP merges with one of the three leading parties, it may not survive.

Current Political Issues

None of the leading parties have yet addressed the critical issues of economic austerity and recovery that will face a civilian government. Management failures and continued economic deterioration have been the principal downfall of every Ghanaian government since Nkrumah was overthrown by the military in 1966. The Akuffo regime has mapped out a politically painful course of long-term economic reform and stabilization in cooperation with the International Monetary Fund and Western donor countries, which future civilian leaders may not have the political will to see through successfully. One aspect

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of the stabilization program--the need for a radical devaluation of the Ghanaian currency--has already become a widely discussed and misunderstood political issue among civilian politicians. [REDACTED]

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The Akuffo regime is under intense pressure from a number of old-guard politicians, such as PNP leader Imoru Egala, who were disqualified last December from contesting elections because of their alleged corruption under previous regimes. The government recently created a judicial tribunal with the power to review complaints and to set aside disqualifications of politicians seeking a clean bill of health. At the same time, the government set up a body to investigate the assets of any member of Ghana's three military governments who wishes to run for future public office. [REDACTED]

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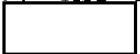
One potential complication that could delay the process of moving Ghana back to civilian rule could be shaping up, although most Ghanaians do not want to see any slippage in the timetable. Ghana's electoral commission is coming under pressure to reopen the voter rolls for additional voter registration before national elections are scheduled in May or June. The head of the commission recently told a US Embassy official that if the time-consuming voter registration process is reopened, he foresees a delay of several months before elections could be held. The last open period for voter registration, which by law occurs only every 10 years, was in 1977 during the rule of unpopular General Acheampong. At that time of general apathy, an estimated 86 percent (some 4 million) of Ghana's eligible voters were said to have registered, although the real figure could be considerably lower. [REDACTED]

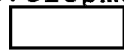
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Nigeria: Oil Developments (U)

Nigeria, which a year ago was suffering from a sharp drop in oil production and revenue, reportedly exported a record 2.5 million barrels of oil per day last December. The previous record of approximately 2.4 million barrels per day was set in June 1974. US oil company executives believe that Nigeria will continue to produce oil at near maximum rates (currently 2.4 million barrels per day) throughout the first half of 1979. Production started to rebound last spring in response to Nigerian price discounts and the shift by Saudi Arabia in its mix of exports toward heavy crude, which has increased the demand for Nigeria's lighter, low-sulfur oil. It was further encouraged by the government's lifting of production ceilings last November. The recent cutback in Iranian oil output, however, has enabled Lagos to produce at near-sustainable capacity while eliminating price discounts and taking advantage of the last price increase agreed on by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries. 

General Obasanjo's military government needs increased oil revenues not only to cover current expenditures, but to help replenish eroded foreign exchange reserves in preparation for the scheduled changeover this October to civilian rule. The regime, which feels vulnerable to public criticism that it has wasted money, hopes to be remembered as an activist government that successfully managed the economy. The military therefore wants to be able to give a good financial accounting to an incoming civilian government. It also wants to provide a Treasury surplus to help ensure the survivability of a civilian regime, which is likely to inherit a sagging economic development plan and other formidable economic problems. 

Nigeria's increased oil production benefits the United States and Western Europe, the traditional customers for the bulk of its oil. During the 1973-74 Arab oil embargo, Nigeria's revenue needs also caused it to

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step up production, thus partially countering shortages experienced by US and European oil buyers. The latest situation again suggests that Nigeria's persistent revenue needs will probably continue to take precedence over any temptation to consider using oil as a political weapon against Western countries, particularly in support of its southern Africa - oriented foreign policy. []

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Nigeria's membership in OPEC apparently is being privately questioned by some civilian politicians, although the current front-running and northern Muslim-oriented National Party has publicly declared its support for OPEC. Members of two of the country's other four competing parties recently told US Embassy officials that Nigeria would withdraw from OPEC if their parties won control of the government in national elections later this year. The rationale for a Nigerian withdrawal is that OPEC artificially limits oil production, while Nigeria would derive greater economic benefit by producing and selling oil on its own at lower prices. Such views may be only a short-term phenomenon generated by present favorable market conditions that temporarily invalidate OPEC's advantages. []

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Nigeria's various military regimes have regarded OPEC as extremely important to the country's economic well-being and foreign policy, and we believe Lagos would be unlikely to withdraw from OPEC. The grouping has been seen as the country's best hope to maximize oil revenues for economic development, despite a feeling that Nigeria's particular economic needs are not fully taken into account by OPEC's dominant Arab policymakers and disappointment with the lukewarm support Arab OPEC members have given to the southern Africa struggle for majority rule. []

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Another important element on the oil scene is the eagerness of Nigeria's military rulers to obtain a ruling from the United States--before they relinquish power--that Nigeria will be approved as a future supplier of liquefied natural gas for the US market. The government now sees liquefied natural gas as an important future source of revenue as oil reserves eventually dwindle. It is aggressively pushing its five selected oil company partners to begin construction of a major \$7.4 billion project to liquefy natural gas for export to the United States in the late 1980s. []

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Mauritius: Political Maneuvering (U)

Political maneuvering in Mauritius has increased recently with the approach of meetings of the ruling Labor Party and of the opposition Mauritian Militant Movement (MMM). The MMM is weakened by internal disputes and is under growing domestic criticism on the eve of its Central Committee elections this Sunday. Labor also suffers internal problems but seems determined to present a unified image for its party congress in April, when many expect Prime Minister Ramgoolam to announce his retirement. Labor's unity is fragile, however, and depends in large part on whether Ramgoolam actually steps aside. His failure to do so would probably renew the infighting that has characterized Labor since it came close to losing power in the 1976 national elections and could revive the MMM's diminishing political influence. []

MMM's Decline and Prospects

The MMM, which came within two seats of winning a majority in the General Assembly in the 1976 elections, was until recently an aggressive, well-organized opposition party and posed a constant threat to the ruling Labor coalition. At the beginning of last year, the Movement's reputation began to slip as the popularity of its leader, Secretary General Berenger, diminished. Last spring, Berenger's credibility was severely damaged when his public accusation that the State Security Service had masterminded the arson of the MMM newspaper was proved false. Subsequently his reputation declined further in December when he led dock workers in an unpopular strike. []

Infighting has also contributed to the MMM's decline. The left wing has disassociated itself from the Movement's major policies by publishing position papers that spell out its differences. At the same time, party stalwarts have criticized Berenger for his inequitable distribution of patronage among various ethnic groups

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Labor's Outlook

Labor Party problems--which have included an ineffective party hierarchy, a constant challenge from the MMM, and major economic difficulties--were aggravated early last year when deputy party leader Harish Boodhoo formed a group of younger, reform-minded radicals within the party. Last fall, Boodhoo's group, which enjoyed a large measure of support from National Assembly members and the sympathy of some key Cabinet members, seemed determined to force Ramgoolam to call elections by voting against several Labor-sponsored bills. [REDACTED]

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Ramgoolam, knowing that a divided Labor Party would fare badly in elections, held private consultations with the Boodhoo group during December in an attempt to smooth over intraparty tensions. The results of the meeting were never publicized, but the Prime Minister probably upbraided the dissidents for endangering the party's future and promised them that he would retire by spring. He also authorized the creation of a committee to investigate government corruption and nepotism, a major demand of the dissidents. After the talks, the reform group split, and most of its members began voting with the government on crucial issues before the Assembly. [REDACTED]

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This new unity within Labor coincided with Berenger's encouragement of the dock workers' strike. As the government stood firmly against the union's demands, which the public considered excessive, support for Labor increased at the expense of Berenger's popularity. The MMM left wing also published its controversial position papers the same month, embarrassing the movement's leadership and enhancing Labor's image as a united party. []

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Labor's unity is fragile, however, and probably depends in large part on Ramgoolam following through on his promise to retire. Although he is in his late 70s and suffers frequently from ill health, the Prime Minister has made no plans to retire, however, and probably hopes to retain his position. In the face of stiff opposition to his staying in office, the Prime Minister might announce plans to create a republic, in which case he would probably be able to move into a figurehead position as president. []

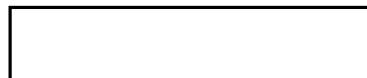
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There is also an outside chance that Ramgoolam will call elections if he believes that his staying in office will not jeopardize Labor's cohesion. Elections would force the party to maintain a united posture in the hope of gaining a majority of Assembly seats. Afterwards, the party is likely to face a resurgence of the problems that haunted it earlier. []

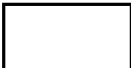
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Liberia: Tolbert's Quiet Revolution (U)

Since becoming President in 1971,* William Tolbert, 65, has presided over a quiet revolution that has featured a gradual increase in the pace of social and political change begun by his predecessor and has earned him the reputation as the country's leading reformer. Implicit in Tolbert's reforms are a dilution of control by Liberia's traditional oligarchy, narrowing of the chasm between the settler elite and tribal majority, and a shift toward a younger, more rural, and indigenous educated class in the country's political and economic affairs. 

Tolbert's changes have been more evolutionary than spectacular, and much remains to be done to bring the country more into the mainstream of the 20th century. The trend in Liberia, nonetheless, has been away from overt repression and toward a far more mobile and politically open society, which no successor to Tolbert is likely to be able to reverse. Tolbert's effort to bring more rapid progress to Liberia has not been without political risks since it challenges the privileged position of the old-guard elite and fosters even greater popular expectations. Tolbert's judicious pursuit of reform has proved acceptable so far to the privileged class, despite some resistance and residual bitterness, and it clearly is popular in the hinterland. Should the Tolbert government or its successor falter in meeting popular aspirations, there are at least two radical opposition groups waiting in the wings that could try to gain power and offer more drastic solutions to the country's inequities. 

*Tolbert succeeded to office upon the death of President Tubman, whom he served as Vice President for 19 years. Tolbert was elected in his own right to an eight-year term in 1975 and apparently is barred by a constitutional amendment he engineered from standing for reelection in 1983. (C)

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Liberia's Unique Social Fabric

While Tolbert's reform efforts may seem modest, they are significant given Liberia's unique and deeply entrenched social structure. Never a European colony, the country is Africa's oldest independent republic and friend of the United States. Liberia was colonized by freed American and West Indian slaves beginning in 1822 and became an independent state in 1847, with a constitution modeled after that of the United States. The ruling True Whig Party has been in power since 1881, and no other parties have been able to qualify in recent years for legal recognition to contest elections. []

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Descendents of freedmen immigrants, known as Americo-Liberians, are at the apex of the country's social structure. They traditionally have controlled political power, owned most of the country's wealth, and set the cultural style which continues to reflect roots in the pre-Civil War American South. The cohesion of approximately 20,000 Americo-Liberians has been essential to their domination of some 1.5 million people of indigenous tribal origin, whom they subjugated in the 19th century and kept for the most part in a dependent status until very recently. []

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So far every Liberian president has been of Americo-Liberian descent. Some 200 top families from the elite which maintains its unity primarily through intermarriage. Clubs and Christian churches patterned on American models are of secondary importance to the elite in maintaining its preeminence. The lower elite of Americo-Liberians consists of those who--by virtue of their middle-level managerial, professional, and administrative positions--are entitled to be called "honorables" in the Liberian system. They are the essential educated core which makes the country function and their origin is perhaps half Americo-Liberian and half tribal. Liberia's next group--its small middle class of some 60,000--is almost wholly of tribal origin and has accepted only some aspects of Western-style life. The majority of the tribal people at the lowest end of the social spectrum are almost totally unassimilated. []

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Social mobility in Liberia--particularly into the elite group--has been limited, but it is gradually becoming somewhat easier for a tribal Liberian to enter the

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Americo-Liberian community. Immigrant-indigenous barriers are slowly becoming more blurred by the accessibility of increasing numbers of tribal people to paid employment and education, by increased urbanization, and by improvement in the internal transportation network. [REDACTED]

There are two main avenues for social advancement by indigenous peoples. One is to become, through either illegitimate descent from or loyalty in service to an Americo-Liberian, a ward of some rich and powerful individual. The other results from the elite's co-optation of the most talented and aggressive of the tribal group. Those who work their way into the lower elite serve at the will of their superiors and are not fully accepted as equals. The assimulant's success depends on his willingness to accept a Western life-style, to use English, to profess Christianity, and to accept the concepts of private ownership and individual responsibility. [REDACTED]

Tolbert's Family Position and Political Base

Despite appearances to the contrary, President Tolbert is less a part of the Americo-Liberian elite and less tied to its protection than any previous Liberian president. The Tolbert family has strikingly few links to the most prominent Liberian families, and the

[REDACTED] Tolbert family marriages are mainly to minor Americo-Liberian families or to tribal elements. In fact, a key base of the President's power has been his skillful cultivation of political aspirations and ties among tribal peoples. His long-term aim is to develop an alternative power elite led by educated, integrated tribal elements. Tolbert's appeal to tribal peoples has helped him at times to check incipient opposition to reform by the traditional elite. Many of his reformist ideas, however, are well in advance of and constrained by the beliefs of his associates in the True Whig Party leadership, who have powerful and independent political bases of their own. [REDACTED]

*The Tolberts are relative latecomers on the Liberian scene. President Tolbert's parents emigrated to Liberia from South Carolina in 1878. (U)

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Recent "Unification" Trends

The past two years have seen continued efforts by Tolbert to broaden the appeal and support of his government by eroding the privileges of the traditional elite--removing barriers to the assimilation of tribal peoples--and redirecting additional budgetary resources for the benefit of the rural poor.* [REDACTED]

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In October 1977, much to the consternation of many Americo-Liberians, Tolbert oversaw the special election of Bernie Warner--of indigenous descent--to fill the vacancy caused by the death of Vice President Greene. It is unclear whether Tolbert intends to groom Warner as Liberia's next president, but were Tolbert to die in office, the 42-year-old Warner, a Methodist Bishop, would constitutionally succeed to the presidency for the remainder of Tolbert's unexpired term. If Tolbert pushes Warner's candidacy for the 1983 presidential election, the traditional establishment might well throw its weight behind an Americo-Liberian standard bearer. Having governed Liberia throughout its history, the Americo-Liberian elite is devoted to its continued hegemony and not to the wishes of a man who will eventually be a lame duck president. This group is still adept at dividing, dissipating, and absorbing threats to its grip on power.

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Warner has no previous political experience and thus far has shown no overt presidential ambitions. He successfully portrays himself as a self-made man in Liberia's highly stratified society, however, and has been welcomed by many ordinary Liberians as a fresh face on the political scene. Like Tolbert, Warner is an outspoken critic of corruption and is considered pro-American. He has attended several American graduate schools. [REDACTED]

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*Rural health and road development projects are being cut back substantially this year as part of a temporary reallocation of most government revenue to underwrite the cost of hosting the annual summit meeting of the Organization of African Unity this July in Monrovia. President Tolbert will be designated OAU Chairman for the coming year and will assume the leadership of Africa's most important regional organization. [REDACTED]

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Tolbert has also been bringing young and well-educated talent, mainly from indigenous areas, into the lower levels of the True Whig Party and the government bureaucracy. Last year, the tradition of extralegal immunity for settler elites from strong punishment was challenged when the Tolbert government tried and executed several members of prominent families in Maryland County for their part in a ritual murder. [REDACTED]

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While there has been much progress in assimilation and improvement in the rights of tribal Liberians, they still are not accorded across-the-board privileges equal to the settler elite.* For example, the Liberian constitution and several laws dating from the 19th century remain ambiguous on guarantees of citizenship privileges for the tribal population. This has led to repeated demands for a review of the Constitution and laws to reflect modern Liberian practice under the Tolbert administration. [REDACTED]

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The Challenge of Rising Expectations

To maintain stability over the longer run, the Liberian Government must continue to reduce the schism between the settler elite and tribal majority. Tensions have been magnified in the last three decades by the growing economic disparity between the two groups, with the elite receiving most wealth accruing to Liberia from foreign operated iron ore mining and rubber plantation concessions. Increasing numbers of Liberians entering the modern sector of the economy** and the growing political awareness among tribal peoples have resulted in significantly greater demands from unskilled workers for more benefits and from upcountry areas for public services. The problem is compounded by the country's modest economic means and the unrealistic demands of many average Liberians who do not understand the limitations imposed by these means. Slow progress in reducing

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25X1 endemic governmental corruption and bureaucratic lethargy also is being questioned by increasingly vocal young critics. []

25X1 Worker militancy, particularly among the majority of Liberia's nonunionized laborers employed by foreign--predominantly American--concessions, is becoming a growing headache for both management and government. Labor disputes and wildcat strikes are occurring more frequently. The few organized trade unionists in the mining sector--some 15,000--have also proved uncontrollable at times. The Tolbert regime, fearful that labor could become a better organized political force, is groping for a coherent labor policy. Thus far it has been prone to resolve most disputes in favor of workers, much to the irritation of foreign concessionaires that traditionally have had a cozy relationship with Liberian governments. []

25X1 There have been reports in recent years of discontent among indigenous Liberians who make up almost entirely Liberia's small military establishment, particularly among enlisted men and lower ranking officers who are unhappy with their exclusion from benefits available to senior officers. Military careers traditionally have held little interest for Americo-Liberians, but have always provided some limited upward social mobility for indigenous peoples. The Liberian elite has been concerned for some time that members of the Kru and Loma tribes are overrepresented in the Army. The elite has not forgotten an antigovernment plot in 1973 involving officers of tribal origin. Even so, the Liberian military has been remarkably apolitical. It traditionally has been ineptly led, poorly equipped, and politically manipulated by the regime to ensure docility. Moreover, Army ranks are tribally mixed and this, along with natural intertribal rivalries which make for mutual distrust, helps assure a stable and loyal military. []

25X1 Despite growing assertiveness by tribal peoples, there appears to be little chance they would engage in a widespread violent uprising.* Most indigenous elements

*The last outbreak of tribal violence against the central government was a Kru uprising in the 1930s. The Kru have the strongest warrior tradition of Liberian tribes and are considered strongwilled and independent. Their rebellion was crushed by Loma Army troops who have a strong reputation for loyalty to the government and who largely make up the presidential guard. []

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25X1 want a larger share of the national pie rather than outright revolution. Those most disgruntled have not yet developed an effective political organization. Liberia's 16 tribes are small, widely scattered, loosely organized, and have no predominant group around which to coalesce.

Liberian Opposition Groups

The Tolbert regime has been more tolerant than its predecessors of open dissent and allows two opposition groups to function relatively freely, though they are not legally recognized and are closely monitored. Tolbert is reluctant to suppress dissidents--and risk generating public sympathy for them--so long as they are not too troublesome. Existing opposition groups, which are too radical in appearance to attract a significant following at this time, pose no immediate threat to the Liberian establishment.

The Progressive Alliance of Liberia (PAL) was founded in 1974 by Liberian students in the United States and has only in the last two years begun organizing openly in Liberia. It is led by 30-year-old Gabriel Mathews, a former member of Liberia's UN mission. Intelligent and articulate, he comes from mixed Americo-Liberian and tribal stock. The US Embassy in Monrovia believes PAL may become a significant force in Liberian politics over the next few years, with the potential to attract considerable support among younger, better educated Liberians seeking change.

The group espouses a vague form of African socialism, but is committed to working for peaceful change within Liberia's existing system. It favors redistribution of the country's wealth, state ownership of the means of production, and an end to what is regarded as foreign economic exploitation of Liberia. PAL's main base of support appears to be among young professionals in Monrovia, with some following among foreign concession workers and the rural elite.

PAL's main aim at present is to become a legally recognized opposition party. So far, Mathews has been unable to obtain the required signatures of 300 land-owning Liberians necessary for PAL to be registered as a party.

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The US Embassy believes that the more radical, Marxist-oriented Movement for Justice in Africa (MOJA), now the leading Liberian opposition group, has largely peaked in its influence and will become a waning force in Liberian politics. It was founded in 1973 by left-wing Liberian intellectuals and university professors. MOJA has a considerable following among leftist Liberian university students. The group has actively sought to organize mining and rubber plantation workers and is a source of worry to business and government officials trying to cope with Liberia's rising worker militancy.

MOJA's chief organizer and spokesman, 38-year-old Togba Nah Tipoteh, is one of Liberia's most energetic young radicals and is considered pro-Communist. Tipoteh, an American-trained economist of Kru tribal origin, is admired by his followers for the boldness of his public criticism of capitalism, the United States, and the "exploitative" Tolbert regime which he sees as a "tool of American imperialism" in Africa. Tipoteh was dismissed from the faculty of the University of Liberia in 1974, in part because of his outspoken advocacy of socialist economics.

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CONGO: Colonel Denis Sassou-Nguesso was named President on 8 February by the ruling Congolese Workers Party succeeding General Yhomby-Opango, who was ousted earlier in the week. The two men--both northerners--had been engaged in a two-year power struggle that may not yet be over. Southerners, excluded from power since 1968, and ideological extremists are also involved in the contest. The Congo's new power structure and policy orientation may not become clear until after a party congress, scheduled for late next month. [REDACTED]

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Formerly Minister of Defense, the 36-year-old Sassou-Nguesso is regarded as more leftist and pro-Soviet than the relatively pragmatic Yhomby-Opango. It is too early to tell, however, whether the Congo's greater openness toward the West and the United States in recent years may now be reversed. The country's need for Western assistance, particularly from ex-metropole France, to meet its serious economic problems militates against more radical policies. Brazzaville remains outwardly calm, and the change of leadership seems popular. [REDACTED]

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